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## Saving Our Youth Who Make Criminal Mistakes - Is it Possible?



Fourth Judicial Circuit Juvenile Unit: (L-R) APD Anthony Barney, APD Rachel Schumon, Attorney Elizabeth Webb, Paralegal Nicola Pare, Division Chief Jenna Love, Paralegal Butch Tanner, Director Rob Mason, Public Defender Matt Shirk, Legal Assistant Nicole Butler, Juvenile Mentor Sylvester Black, APD Diana Johnson, APD Rob Bowers.

Even though there are many juveniles serving time, according to the Office of the Defender, Attorneys from the Juvenile Unit in the Office of Public Defender Matt Shirk say they work tirelessly defending clients and during a ten-day period within the month of May earned two difficult 'not guilty' verdicts in trials and various other legal victories.

For example, APD Diana Johnson led the defense where her client was charged with marijuana possession. She said, together she and her second chair in that trial, Rob Mason, convinced the judge to rule "not guilty" because the State used a flawed process of identifying the 'substance' which the client was accused of possessing giving reasonable doubt that it was indeed marijuana.

Because of the number of juveniles in the State of Florida that have been given extremely long sentences as well as life sentences for crimes less than murder, many citizens are asking how to be assigned a 'winning' defender.

This week's Letter to the Editor is from a Florida prison inmate who is concerned about the case of the 15 year old who received 70 years in prison. In fact, the writer pointed out some things that he feels will be helpful in the case, and wondered why the juvenile's attorney did not present or order such.